

What Does Greater **TRANSPARENCY** In Government Spending Have To Do With Your **PROPERTY TAXES?**



Frequently Asked Questions

Why is greater local government transparency necessary?

Civic engagement and participation are the cornerstones of good government. They require efforts to make government data *actionable*, not just *accessible*. Our initiative is not intended to generate data for data's sake, but rather to provide useful information that is helpful and illuminating, motivates action and increases government efficiency. We seek to build communities of users who will become active participants in their local governments.

Moreover, as long as state funds continue to be used to subsidize local services, local spending transparency will take on greater urgency. When state and local funds are co-mingled, it's no longer about ensuring accountability just to local voters. State taxpayers also have a direct and compelling interest in local cost structures and in the efficiency of local spending.

Won't greater transparency create a lot of additional work and cost for local governments?

Most governments already have this information. It is just not reported publicly or in sufficient detail to allow taxpayers to identify and understand relevant issues and spending trends.

The Office of the State Auditor offers a Uniform Chart of Accounts designed for cities and towns which supports this type of disclosure. Notably, school districts already provide this detailed information, available on the Department of Education's website. Indeed, there may be some costs associated with establishing a reporting system that is available in one place and standardized to facilitate comparisons among local governments.

We see local governments as potential partners in this initiative, not targets. We welcome local officials to join in this effort because in areas such as state mandates, only the involvement of citizens can create the critical mass of opinion needed for the changes and reforms they seek. Similarly, with respect to standardized object code spending disclosure, we seek to work with them to determine the best ways to present and share this information with their constituents.

Won't greater transparency make local budgeting processes more difficult for local officials?

We expect it to enable more taxpayers to engage with their local officials, actively participate in the budget setting process, and improve the quality of public debate over local spending. In a representative democracy, those are worthwhile goals.

Even if an increased level of taxpayer participation makes the local government budget-setting process a little more challenging, the alternative is far worse. If citizens become frustrated with local levies and feel powerless to do anything about them, there will be calls for draconian "Prop 13"-type initiatives and state directed tax and spending limitations.

Is greater transparency really about shrinking the size of local government?

No. This is an initiative conceived and launched to support discussions regarding government efficiency and productivity, rather than influence how big or expansive government should be. Local governments should have full freedom to deliver services based on citizen desires, needs and expectations. But, by definition, the more public services a local government offers and the higher the quality of those services, the more efficient it simply has to be. Otherwise, costs explode and communities suffer as property taxes increase while the business climate deteriorates.

Shouldn't state government provide greater transparency as well?

Absolutely.